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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

Statement submitted by the International Council of Women, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, the Miramed Institute, Pax Christi International Catholic Peace Movement, the Temple of Understanding, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the World Federation for Mental Health, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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Statement on sex trafficking and prostitution

The above-mentioned non-governmental organizations,

Reaffirming the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women,

Reaffirming the 1926 Slavery Convention and the 1958 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery,

Recalling that prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purposes of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and endanger the welfare of the individual, the family and the community, as stated in the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of Others, along with a commitment to punish any person who procures, entices, or leads away, for the purposes of prostitution, another person, even with the consent of that person,

Reaffirming the recognition of the widespread and varied forms of violence against women stated in the report of the Fourth World Conference on Women as well as the concern for the mental and physical well-being of women and the need for programmes to educate and empower women in all areas of life,

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Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 52/98 on traffic in women and girls and the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/53/409),

Reaffirming the commitment to mental health made at the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women,

Alarmed that women have been disproportionately marginalized by the structural adjustment programmes of the last decade, petty and high-level corruption of government officials, the rise of organized crime and the increase in regional and local warfare and natural disasters,

Alarmed by the spread of HIV/AIDS worldwide,

Deeply concerned that prostitution and trafficking are integral parts of a rapidly expanding global sex industry which is taking new and pernicious forms, including sex tourism, mail order bride trade, pornography and the use of the Internet for purposes of sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons,

Convinced by the experience of survivors and research that sex trafficking, prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation constitute severe forms of violence and sex discrimination mediated by persistent prejudicial social attitudes against racially, ethnically and economically marginalized groups, as well as against persons with physical or mental disability,

Recognizing that the majority of commercially sexually exploited persons are children, adolescents and women with young children,

Disturbed that the violent and discriminatory nature of prostitution and trafficking is masked by terms which equate it with a moral failure by the victim or which dignify it as a form of labour,

Disturbed that prostitution and trafficking are under-researched problems due to lack of political will, by definitions of violence unreflective of women's actual experiences, and by law enforcement and immigration policies which treat sexually exploited or trafficked persons as criminals and which allow pimps, procurers, traffickers and customers to victimize millions of women and children each year with impunity,

Urge the Committee on the Status of Women and the United Nations Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality to make sex trafficking, prostitution and all levels of the global sex industry a priority issue in their follow-ups to the Fourth World Conference on Women;

Urge United Nations treaty bodies, in particular the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee, to ensure that States Parties monitor and report on the extent and incidence of commercial sex exploitation as well as on the violence accompanying them, so that by the year 2010, 90 per cent of country reports contain thorough research and documentation;

Urge United Nations agencies, especially UNIFEM, UNAIDS, UNDP, INSTRAW and the ILO, as well as States parties to relevant treaties and non-governmental organizations, to refrain from language which dignifies prostitution as a form of labour or legitimately chosen condition, so that all United Nations documents use appropriate language by the year 2002 and 95 per cent of the legislative and policy-making documents of States parties reflect appropriate terminology by the year 2005;

Urge United Nations agencies and States parties to reject development policies which intensify the marginalization of women and children or which place them at risk of sexual exploitation, substance abuse or sexually transmitted diseases, and in cooperation with NGOs to develop community-based prevention programmes, in particular targeting children, adolescents and women with young children, that identify the risks of commercial sexual exploitation and offer alternative livelihood projects;

Urge United Nations agencies, States parties and non-governmental organizations to develop and implement programmes for victims of the sex industry, irrespective of their civil or immigration status, and that include, without charge, shelter, confidential health care, including treatment for HIV/AIDS, psychological rehabilitation, legal services and alternative livelihood projects;

Call upon Governments to decriminalize the act or condition of being sexually exploited, and to criminalize the acts of pimping, procuring, sex trafficking and purchasing of sex, regardless of the consent given by the sexually exploited, and to facilitate the enforcement of such laws by instituting appropriate witness protection and asylum programmes for victims, and in cooperation with NGOs to develop and implement programmes to educate law

enforcement, medical and social work personnel about the nature and effects of commercial sexual exploitation;

Urge all Governments to ratify the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, so that the Convention achieves 100 per cent ratification by the year 2005.